

"I don't think I had much choice really. I was so chaotic and in deep personal trouble with various things like my rotten marriage, childhood sexual abuse and two children under 8. I was a mess. I didn't need this, but could not get out of it."

"He offered some security and there were things he was really helpful with. He'd take me to beautiful places and I was so stressed out I really needed that break."

The sexually abusive clergy is often very skilled at meeting your personal and emotional needs, but then comes to gradually sexualise the relationship.

### **This is always wrong.**

Often one is unaware of the inappropriateness until too late. This is why sexual abuse/ exploitation is profoundly confusing and damaging.

### **Is it my fault? Is this an "affair"?**

***It is always the Pastor's responsibility if a sexual relationship develops.***

You have become embroiled in a sexual relationship that should never have begun.

If you consulted your priest or minister for any of the pastoral reasons given above, and the priest or minister then engaged you in a sexual relationship, it is not your fault.

This is not an "affair" but clergy sexual exploitation.

### **What should I do now?**

This is a difficult question. Most Church leaders still consider these situations as

"affairs". Adults are perceived to have 'consented' as Church leaders do not often accept the issue of vulnerability or breach of professional ethics. Britain is behind many other countries in this area, e.g. Australia, New Zealand and the USA. As with most cases of sexual offences against women, the women are often not believed or supported. We have, however, found some female clergy supportive to some women.

Before approaching Church leaders it is **vital** you speak to someone who knows about professional boundary violation of a sexual nature.



### **Help & Advice**

This leaflet is produced by MACSAS and we are ready to offer help and advice: **MACSAS** - Minister & Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors (group).

A national organisation supporting women or men sexually abused by Clergy or Ministers, as a child **or** as an adult.

The co-ordinator of MACSAS is a professional social work trainer in the field of sexual violation. She has extensive knowledge of this area and has lectured internationally on this subject.

**Help can only be offered, in the first instance, by correspondence; please write (include a phone number or e-mail if possible) to:**

**MACSAS  
PO Box 46933  
London E8 1XA, UK**

(This ***is*** the full address)

# **Clergy or Minister sexual exploitation of Adults in the Pastoral Relationship**

## **What you need to know**

## What is a Pastoral Relationship?

Where a Priest or Minister offers a service to you in the following contexts:

- As your Pastor at the Church you attend on Sunday.
- As a tutor/mentor/supervisor/Novice guardian at College, Seminary, or where you are training for ministry or Religious life.
- As Chaplain of a hospital or college you attend.
- As a person you go/went to for help, advice, guidance, support or spiritual direction or counselling.
- As a trained psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor and to whom you go/went in that capacity.
- Is offering Healing Ministry to you.
- Is your confessor (confession).

(From here on 'Clergy' or 'Pastor' refers to all ordained ministry, regardless of the denomination. The pronoun 'he' will be used for clergy abusers since the majority of offenders are male, however we recognise female clergy and nuns have sometimes been sexual offenders also.)

## What do you mean by Sexual Exploitation?

A Clergy person should always behave in a professional way when with people to whom he/she is Pastor or is in a pastoral relationship with. This means they should never romanticise or sexualise the relationship.

The Clergy person holds the complete responsibility for keeping the boundaries. He is in a more powerful position and has a specific role (Pastor) and should therefore never create a second or dual relationship, i.e. a sexual relationship.

Sexual exploitation is:

- Sexual harassment
- Hugs, touching, kissing, fondling, groping
- Masturbation/digital penetration
- Sexual intercourse
- Oral sex
- Rape

Exploitation occurs whether or not you believe that you are consenting and voluntarily entering a sexual relationship.

## Why is sex within the pastoral relationship always wrong?

When you go to see a Clergy person for help, advice or as a person in need, you should never expect to be encouraged into a sexual relationship. Just as we understand this should not happen if we were to visit a physiotherapist, doctor or psychologist.

Seeking the help or support from clergy at times of stress or crises in your life means you are more vulnerable emotionally and more easily taken advantage of/exploited by a pastor who seeks to engage you in a sexual relationship.

For a Clergy person to breach the sexual boundaries in a pastoral relationship is a violation of ethics.

Clergy are in a more powerful position and **meaningful** consent is never possible when there is this difference in power.

It is never your responsibility to maintain the boundaries.

It is always the professional's – priest's, minister's – duty, to keep the boundaries. If you become worried you should seek help from us.

These are some warning signs:

- Sexual comments about your appearance, body or private life.
- Flirting.
- An inappropriate interest in details of your sex life.
- Inappropriate touching, anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Requests or suggestions that the relationship be moved into a social context, such as going out for lunch.
- Seeing you late at night, when there is no-one around, or visiting you at home and more frequently.

- Discussing his own problems.
- Sexual jokes or innuendo.
- Sexualising the conversation.
- Encouraging you to be dependent on him.
- Phoning you at home to chat.
- Sitting close to you, hugs become more frequent, more intimate.
- Touches which feel uncomfortable, confusing or upsetting.
- Suggestions that sex will 'cure', 'heal' you of intimate problems.
- Suggestions that God has put him in your life to heal you of sexual difficulties.
- Suggestions that God has told him to become intimate in order to heal you.
- Suggestions that sex is a 'Holy' thing and therefore not wrong between you and him.
- Any attempt to destabilise an already established relationship you may have with a partner.
- He gives you personal gifts.
- You are receiving unusual time and attention.

## Sexualising the Pastoral Relationship is very confusing.

Women (and some men) describe how confusing the sexualized relationship can be:

"At first I was flattered. It made me feel special, loved, wanted and valued. Especially at a time in my life when things looked bleak and dreadful."

"He said it was alright, that by having loving sex I'd be healed of the past. I trusted him and didn't think he'd do anything to harm me."

"I was terrified people would find out so couldn't really discuss it with anyone to check out whether it really was OK."